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INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0978
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4064
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1457
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 4115
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 1212
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0355
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3204
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 8047
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 5659
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001407

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/11/2017

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SUBJECT: ARBOUR PROVIDES INTERIM READOUT OF HER VISIT TO
SRI LANKA

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

11. (C) Summary: At a working lunch on October 11 UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour expressed doubt that she will be able to negotiate during this trip an increase in the staff of the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombo with a broad mandate. She wants to leave on good terms and intends to pursue the idea however. She commented that the upcoming Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva on December 10 provides some leverage. She has informed the GSL that she will brief the HRC on the outcome of her visit to Sri Lanka and that an unsatisfactory outcome could trigger renewed efforts by the EU and others to pursue a statement on the Sri Lankan human rights situation. End Summary.

Seeking Expanded Presence with Broad Mandate

12. (C) The Canadian Ambassador hosted a working lunch for the Ambassadors of the U.S., EU, U.K. (representing the Portuguese EU Presidency), Germany, Netherlands, Australia, Norway, Switzerland and India with Arbour and her key staff. Arbour expressed doubt that she will be able to negotiate an increase in the OHCHR presence with a broad mandate during this visit. She said her message to President Rajapaksa and other members of the government has been that she wants to see a strengthened presence coupled with a robust mandate for this new personnel, a mandate that includes the office's right to speak publicly. Arbour noted that the government has expressed an interest in increasing technical cooperation and capacity building, but has not responded on the sensitive questions of whether new OHCHR personnel would be permitted nor whether they would have a broad mandate. Arbour briefed luncheon participants that she thinks it would be a mistake to only pursue technical cooperation because that would make OHCHR "yet another mute human rights institution in Colombo". She further commented that Sri Lanka would benefit from a substantial increased presence and a robust mandate, but she will settle for a more limited presence provided they have a strong mandate.

Human Rights Council

13. (C) Arbour commented that one source of leverage she has is the upcoming Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva on December 10. She noted that Sri Lanka had been fortunate that events in Burma had focused attention away from Sri Lanka. But she said she had informed her interlocutors that she would brief the HRC on the outcome of her visit to Sri Lanka and that an unsatisfactory outcome could trigger renewed efforts by the EU and others to pursue a statement on the Sri Lankan human rights situation.

COI and IIGEP

14. (C) Asked for her views about whether countries supporting the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons who are observing the work of Sri Lanka's Commission of Inquiry should support a renewal of the IIGEP when its mandate expires in November, Arbour responded that the Commission of Inquiry should never have accepted a one-year mandate to accomplish the complicated task of holding hearings on 16 separate cases and publishing their findings. She said that based on her experience with Commissions elsewhere, such a task would take at least 2 to 3 years, but acknowledged prospects for a two year renewal were "zero".

Next Steps

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15. (C) Arbour plans to travel to Jaffna on October 12 and then conclude her visit with a joint press conference with Human Rights Minister Samarasinghe on Saturday, October 13. Ambassadors agreed to meet with local UN Officials early the week of October 15 for a more detailed readout of the visit and to discuss strategy and next steps that we can recommend to capitals for both the December 10 Human Rights Council meetings and future support for the IIGEP/COI process. Post will provide an additional report following that meeting.
BLAKE